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## STEPHEN F. AUSTIN

Considering the difficulties of his task, the completeness of his responsibility for its accomplishment, and its far-reaching results, Stephen F. Austin has claims to being the greatest colonial proprietary in American history.

He was born in Wythe county, Virginia, November 3, 1793, moved to Missouri at the age of five, spent four years (1804-1808) at different Connecticut schools and two at Transylvania university, and at the age of seventeen returned to Missouri, with schooling complete, to plunge into his father's complex business, a part of which he took over in 1817. In 1813 he was elected to the territorial legislature of Missouri, and by successive reëlections served until 1819; in 1815 Governor Clark gave him an adjutant's commission in the Missouri militia; in 1818 he became a director in the ill-fated bank of St. Louis; two years later Governor Miller appointed him judge of the federal circuit of Arkansas; and at the beginning of 1821 he was editing a newspaper at New Orleans.<sup>1</sup> With training and experience of such breadth and versatility and with his intimate knowledge of frontier life, Austin at twenty-eight was well prepared to be the founder and patriarchal ruler of a wilderness commonwealth.

He embarked with his father somewhat dubiously upon the colonization of Texas,<sup>2</sup> and it was partly in obedience to his father's dying wish that he determined to continue the undertaking alone.<sup>3</sup> But having begun, he spent himself in singular

<sup>1</sup> The statements in this paragraph are drawn from a sketch of Moses Austin, written by Stephen F. Austin, and one of Stephen F. Austin, written by his nephew, Colonel Guy M. Bryan, in *A comprehensive history of Texas* (Wooten ed. — Dallas, 1898), 1: 439-447. I have confirmed all of them from contemporary documents, except dates of service in the Missouri legislature.

<sup>2</sup> "I can now go forward with confidence and I hope and pray you will discharge your Doubts as to the Enterprise." Moses Austin to Stephen F. Austin, May 22, 1821, Austin papers, university of Texas. "I myself believed that the probabilities of failure or success were almost equal." Austin to Wharton, April 24, 1829, Austin papers.

<sup>3</sup> "He called me to his bedside and with much distress and difficulty of speech begged me to tell you to take his place and if god in his wisdom thought best to dis-

devotion to the healthy growth of Texas and the welfare of the colonists whom his influence brought to the country and for whose prosperity he felt a personal responsibility. In moments of despondency, when particularly harassed by public duties and anxieties, he longed for a "small farm, a moderate independence, and a wife,"<sup>4</sup> but for the most part he had no time for thoughts of self. His conception of his task extended farther than the mere planting of a number of families in an uninhabited waste; it was to create there a high-toned, intelligent, prosperous, and happy society. "Such an enterprise as the one I undertook in settling an uninhabited country," he wrote in 1832, "must necessarily pass through three regular gradations. The first step was to overcome the roughness of the wilderness, and may be compared to the labor of the farmer on a piece of ground covered with woods, bushes, and brambles, which must be cut down and cleared away, and the roots grubbed out before it can be cultivated. The second step was to pave the way for civilization and lay the foundation for lasting productive advancement in wealth, morality, and happiness. This step might be compared to the ploughing, harrowing, and sowing the ground after it is cleared. The third and last and most important step is to give proper and healthy direction to public opinion, morality, and education—to give tone, character, and consistency to society, which, to continue the simile, is gathering in the harvest and applying it to the promotion of human happiness. In trying to lead the colony through these gradations my task has been one of continued hard labor. I have been clearing away brambles, laying foundations, sowing the seed. The genial influences of cultivated society will be like the sun shedding light, fragrance, and beauty."<sup>5</sup> Ten years of retrospect no doubt helped him to formulate this statement of his purpose, but it is perfectly clear that his aim was in mind from the beginning. To another correspondent he wrote: "My ambition has been to succeed in redeeming Texas from its wilderness state by means of

appoint him in the accomplishment of his wishes and plans formed, he prayed him to extend his goodness to you and enable you to go on with the business in the same way he would have done." Mary Austin, mother of Stephen, to Stephen F. Austin, June 8, 1821, Austin papers.

<sup>4</sup> Austin to W. C. Carr, March 4, 1829, Austin papers.

<sup>5</sup> Austin to his cousin, Mrs. Mary Austin Holley, January 14, 1832 (copy), Austin papers, in file of July, 1831.

the plough alone, in spreading over it North American population, enterprise and intelligence, in doing this I hoped to make the fortunes of thousands and my own amongst the rest. . . I think I derived more satisfaction from the view of flourishing farms springing up in this wilderness than military or political chieftains do from the retrospect of their victorious campaigns. My object is to build up, for the present as well as for future generations. . . I deemed the object laudable and honorable and worthy the attention of honorable men.”<sup>6</sup>

In some ways the time was ripe for his undertaking in 1821. The westward movement had crossed the Mississippi and reached the borders of Texas, and the panic of 1819 and the reorganization of the land system of the United States in 1820 coöperated to stimulate emigration to lands that combined the attractions of princely abundance, accessibility, fertility, and cheapness that amounted in effect to a free gift. Austin’s greatness, therefore, consists not in having overcome difficulties of transportation and communication to induce reluctant colonists to reclaim a distant and inhospitable land, but in the tact with which, on the one hand, he governed his independent western frontiersmen, curbing their intolerance of the “foreigner” and their disgust at his political ineptitude, while on the other, he won and held the confidence of Mexican statesmen, soothing their fear of disloyalty of the colonists and the ultimate absorption of Texas by the United States. Austin stated his problem in a very few words in a letter of 1829: “I had an ignorant, whimsical, selfish and suspicious set of rulers over me to keep good natured, a perplexed, confused colonization law to execute, and an unruly set of North American frontier republicans to controul who felt that they were sovereigns, for they knew that they were beyond the arm of the Govt. or of law, unless it pleased them to be controuled.”<sup>7</sup>

Fortunately, though it seemed to him ruinously unfortunate at the time, the revolution and the political upheaval incident to the establishment of Mexican independence carried Austin to Mexico in the spring of 1822, after many of his colonists had already arrived, and kept him there for a year securing confirma-

<sup>6</sup> Austin to Wharton, April 24, 1829, Austin papers.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

tion of his grant, which had been made by the Spanish régime. There, during the brief space of eleven months, he saw the executive government go through the stages of a regency, an empire, and a military triumvirate—Iturbide elevating himself to the imperial throne by Napoleonic methods and being himself overthrown by Santa Anna posing as a liberal—while the legislature traveled through a provisional *junta gubernativa*, a sovereign elected congress, a rump (the *junta nacional instituyente*), and back again, after the fall of Iturbide, to the congress. With little money, and reduced at last to the extremity of selling his watch, Austin possessed his soul in such patience as he could and gently nagged a national colonization law through Iturbide's rump parliament, only to have it annulled on the return of the legitimate congress by its sweeping decree repealing all acts of the empire. He had won his case, however, and congress instructed the executive to confirm his contract in the terms of the imperial law. Incidentally he had learned the language, gained the confidence and esteem of such men as Anastacio Bustamante, Lorenzo de Zavala, Ramos Arispe, and Lucas Alaman, and obtained an insight into Mexican personal and official character that was the key to his future success. For a foreigner he had exercised a remarkable influence upon the shifting committees of the various legislative bodies. He was largely responsible for the passage of the colonization law,<sup>8</sup> tried his hand at drafting an imperial constitution which combined some of the features of the constitution of the United States with the Spanish constitution of 1812,<sup>9</sup> and, on his departure, left with Ramos Arispe a document<sup>10</sup> which probably in considerable degree shaped the

<sup>8</sup> "I can without boasting say that my constant Exertions and importunity with the Members both directly and indirectly through my friends produced this law." Austin's explanation to the colonists concerning charges for land, June 5, 1824, Austin papers, miscellaneous. See also Austin to Governor Trespalcacios, January 8, 1823, Austin papers.

<sup>9</sup> Draft in English with partial translation into Spanish, March 29-30, 1823, Austin papers, miscellaneous. There are also in this collection: "Plan for organization of Congress for the Empire of Mexico," August, 1822, and "Reflections Addressed to the Junta Instituyente," January 16, 1823.

<sup>10</sup> "Plan de las bases organicas y fundamentales para el establecimiento de una Republica federada en el Anahuac." This is endorsed by Austin: "Copy of a Plan by S. F. Austin in May 1823 in Monterrey translated by Mercado, and delivered to Ramos Arispe and the Comdt, General Felipe de la Garza—both of whom were at that time in Monterrey." The document shows interlineations and suggestions in

*acta constitutiva*, the provisional constitution which bridged the transition from empire to federal republic.

Austin returned to Texas with extraordinary powers. The governor had already invested him with general authority to govern the colony until the regular state administration could be extended to it,<sup>11</sup> and now, by decree of the national government, this power was more specifically defined and extended. He was supreme judge, save that in capital cases he must submit his decision to the commandant general of the eastern interior provinces before execution; he could issue regulations for the government of the settlements when the national laws did not apply; he was commander of the militia, which it was his duty to keep in an efficient state of organization, with the title of lieutenant-colonel, and with authority to wage offensive and defensive war on the Indians;<sup>12</sup> he had sole power to admit immigrants to or exclude them from his colony, which covered an area larger than Massachusetts; and, acting with a commissioner appointed by the governor, he could give title to married men for 4,600 acres of land, subject to improvement in two years, and could greatly augment that amount to men with large families, or to those who established gins, sawmills, or other public conveniences.<sup>13</sup>

Most of this power Austin retained for seven years. The legislature, it is true, was organized in 1824, when Texas was united with Coahuila to the south, but, aside from passing the state colonization law, its attention until 1827 was centered on

Arispe's hand, and he added: "I think it very important that this plan be immediately printed." Austin himself believed that the plan "had much influence in giving unity of intention and direction to the Federal party." As he says, "Arispe was the chairman of the committee who drew up the *Acta Constitutiva*, and a comparison of that act with this plan will show a very striking similarity." *A comprehensive history of Texas*, 1: 490. The document is in Austin papers, miscellaneous. In an article in the *Southwestern historical quarterly*, 20: 19-27, Marion John Atwood emphasizes the Spanish sources of the *acta constitutiva*. I have not as yet had the opportunity to study the influence of Austin's draft.

<sup>11</sup> For these powers, see Martinez to Austin, August 24, 1821, in *A comprehensive history of Texas*, 1: 472; Austin to Garza, May 27, 1823, and Garza to Austin, June 16, 1823, Spanish records, 54: 84, and Translations of the records, 1: 14, in general land office, Austin, Texas.

<sup>12</sup> Documents in *A comprehensive history of Texas*, 1: 473-475.

<sup>13</sup> Austin's power to grant lands in his colony is defined in the imperial colonization law of January 3, 1823, for which see *Laws of Texas* (Gammel ed. — Austin, 1898), 1: 27-30.

the formation of the constitution, so that there was very little legislation for Texas. A local *ayuntamiento* or municipal government was established in 1828, but for several years this took little of the burden of administration from Austin, because, though he steadily refused to accept office in the *ayuntamiento*, the members of that body looked to him for guidance and both state and federal authorities showed a disposition to hold him responsible for the smooth working of the local government. Of the land system he retained direction throughout the colonial period. From inclination as well as from necessity, he followed democratic methods of administration, dividing the colony into districts and allowing the inhabitants to elect *alcaldes*, or justices of the peace, and militia officers, himself hearing appeals from the former and directing the latter. But in the matter of legislation he acted alone, promulgating, with the approval of the political chief at San Antonio, a brief civil and criminal code which was in operation for five years. In his management of the lands of the colony he followed from the beginning the practice of issuing titles only on official surveys and of recording in permanent form all papers connected with the title, including the surveyor's plat of the land. The government made no allowance for the expenses of administration, and in the early days taxation was impossible, so that, except for fees of *alcaldes* and constables, the cost of government fell heavily upon Austin. This was particularly true of his management of the land business, while he was at constant expense also in entertaining travelers and prospectors, sending expresses, giving presents to Indians, and often furnishing munitions and supplies for Indian campaigns.<sup>14</sup>

Anticipating some of these expenses, and wishing also, naturally, compensation for his industry and enterprise, Austin had, before planting a single colonist, arranged, with the knowledge of Governor Martinez, to collect twelve and a half cents an acre for the land in his grant, assuming himself the cost of surveying and of issuing and recording titles. He advertised this in plain and unambiguous terms, and the original settlers accepted it gladly, because elsewhere in Texas they had no right to settle or acquire land at all. The imperial colonization law of

<sup>14</sup> For this paragraph see Eugene C. Barker, "The government of Austin's colony," in *Southwestern historical quarterly*, 21: 223 ff.

1823, in accordance with whose terms, after its repeal, Austin's grant was confirmed, greatly enlarged the headrights which he had planned to allow settlers and provided that he himself should receive as compensation for his labors some 65,000 acres for each two hundred families that he introduced. Whether this was intended to annul the twelve and one-half cent agreement is open to question. Austin thought not, and so explained on his return from Mexico in the summer of 1823. Where each settler could have 4,600 acres for the asking, the *empresario's* 65,000 acres were not likely to yield much ready money for current expenses. Nevertheless, some of the colonists now objected to the payment and carried their complaint to the political chief, who had replaced the governor at San Antonio, and he ruled against Austin's right to charge for the lands. Instead, he fixed a scale of fees for the surveyor, the land commissioner, and the state which Austin thought had no warrant in law. Austin contented himself, however, with making a straightforward defense of his reasons for charging the fee, pointing out the risks, hardships, sacrifices, and expenses he had suffered, and asking plainly if he had not given in labor and responsibility the equivalent of the twelve and a half cents an acre which the colonists had agreed to pay him, or whether they could or would have obtained anything, except through his exertions. Many considered themselves in equity bound by their contracts, one declaring that no candid man in the colony denied the obligation, but Austin relinquished all the contracts and made an arrangement with Bastrop for a division of the fee which the political chief had prescribed for the latter as commissioner. It yielded much less than his contracts with the colonists would have done, but it avoided friction both with them and the political chief. The colonization law which the legislature passed in 1825 recognized the justice of Austin's position and authorized *empresarios* to collect a fee from their settlers in addition to the generous premium of land allowed by the state.<sup>15</sup>

A few of the colonists were already grumbling because they saw Austin granting three, four, and five leagues to some while

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* See also a very excellent discussion of the same subject by Lester G. Bugbee, "Some difficulties of a Texas empresario," in *Publications of the Southern history association*, April, 1899, 97-101.



he allowed them only a paltry 4,600 acres. They were ignorant of Spanish and knew nothing of his powers except what he or his secretary and the commissioner Bastrop told them. Might he not be imposing upon them and exploiting them for his own advantage? Had he any authority either to grant land or govern the colony? The political chief's interference in the matter of the fees helped to strengthen their suspicion, and uneasy whispers increased to a respectable rumble of discontent. The political chief assured them that Austin's authority was ample in every respect, but the excitement subsided slowly and did not disappear until Austin convinced the leaders of his power by arresting them and threatening to send them to San Antonio for trial. The threat and a heart to heart talk were sufficient, and they soon became his staunchest supporters.<sup>16</sup> Austin ascribed much of his trouble to the colonists' ignorance of the language, their exercise of the sacred American right to abuse a public official, and the absence of definite laws. "You know," he wrote in 1825, "that it is innate in an American to suspect and abuse a public officer whether he deserves it or not. I have a mixed multitude to deal with, collected from all quarters, strangers to each other, to me, and to the laws and language of the country. They came here with all the ideas of Americans and expect to see and understand the laws they are governed by, . . . Could I have shown them a law defining positively the quantity of land they were to get and no more and a code of laws by which they were to be governed I should have had no difficulty—but they saw at once that my powers were discretionary, and that a very great augmentation to their grants could be made, and thus the colonization law itself and the authority vested in me under that law holds me up as a public mark to be shot at. . . ."<sup>17</sup> With the readiness of the colonists to "growl" and "grumble" and "mutter," "without knowing why, or without being able to explain why," as he said, he was not, however, disposed to quarrel. "It arose," he thought, "from a principle which is common to all North Americans, a feeling which is the natural offspring of the unbounded republican liberty enjoyed by all classes in the United States; . . . jealousy of those in office,

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, April, 1899, 101-109; Barker, "The government of Austin's colony," in *Southwestern historical quarterly*, 21: 223 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Austin to Edwards, September 15, 1825, Austin papers.

jealousy of undue encroachments on personal rights, and a general repugnance to everything that wore the semblance of a stretch of power.”<sup>18</sup>

Another duty that brought Austin some enemies and much annoyance was that of keeping criminals and men of bad character out of the colony. He required certificates of character from all who obtained land, and though in the nature of things these certificates could be hardly more than formal statements of “parties unknown,” he made remarkably few mistakes.<sup>19</sup> He banished several from the colony in 1823 and 1824 under threat of severe corporal punishment, and in one case applied the lash. Some of the exiles took refuge in the neighboring colony of the Mexican *empresario* De Leon and avenged themselves by making false reports about Austin to the government, and others settled in the no man’s land on the borders of Louisiana and Arkansas and deterred honest emigrants from proceeding to Texas by tales of violence and anarchy. To an enquirer alarmed by such stories in 1829 Austin wrote: “in proportion to our numbers, we are as enlightened, as moral, as good, and as ‘law abiding’ men, as can be found in any part of the United States, and greatly more so than ever settled a frontier”—an opinion the substantial accuracy of which the historian must confirm.<sup>20</sup> For, besides the fact that the immigrants were under a

<sup>18</sup> Austin to White, March 31, 1829, Austin papers. This letter was published by the university of Texas in the *Texas history teachers’ bulletin*, February, 1917, 41-45.

<sup>19</sup> “No person will be admitted as a settler who does not produce satisfactory evidence of having supported the character of a moral, sober, and industrious citizen.” From a printed permit (1821) to settle in Austin’s first colony. Austin endeavored to have immigrants present testimonials from the justice of the peace or some other local official of their former residence in the United States, but this was not always possible, and it is evident that many were received on the recommendation of settlers already in the colony,—on very short acquaintance, one may suspect. There is abundant evidence, however, that Austin tried to give this requirement a real meaning. See, for example, entries in “Register of families in Austin’s colony,” in general land office, Austin, Texas: “John H. Jones, single man, wants a place below tract where John Williams lives . . . and as he is an entire stranger I have required him to produce me satisfactory evidence of his moral conduct” (p. 16); “Henry Martin, Mary his wife, 1 male child, 3 female children . . . has presented no recommendations—his reception as a colonist is to be subject to future evacuation—no certificate is issued to him, and it is entirely optionary with the empresario to receive him or not” (p. 18).

<sup>20</sup> Bugbee, “Some difficulties of a Texas empresario,” in *Publications of the Southern history association*, April, 1899, 109-113; Austin to White, March 31, 1829, Austin papers.

supervision which good policy as well as law required, the great majority, especially of the earlier colonists, were men of family seeking homes, not speculators or adventurers. The state colonization law of 1825 put a premium on marriage by allowing married men four times as much land as unmarried men, while Austin had previously required ten single men to unite into a "family" to obtain a league, the headright of a married man.

It would be impossible to exaggerate Austin's labors in the early years of the colony. A letter to the political chief in 1826 gives a clue to their character and variety. He had left San Felipe on April 4 to point out some land recently conceded to one of the state officials and had been detained by excessive rains and swollen streams until April 29. On May 1 he had begun the trial of an important case that had lasted seven days; at the same time he had had to entertain a delegation of the Tonkaway Indians and make preparations for a campaign against another tribe; to talk to and answer questions of many "foreigners" who had come to look at the country, explaining and translating the federal constitution and some of the laws for them; to receive and pass upon applications for land, hear reports and issue instructions to surveyors; and to correspond with superior civil and military officers. This, May 8, his first free day since returning, was mail day, and he had received two communications and dispatched five.<sup>21</sup> Too much of his time, he once complained, was consumed in settling "neighborhood disputes about cows and calves,"<sup>22</sup> but it was the patience with which he devoted himself to the minutiae of the colony as well as his intelligence and ability in more important things that accounts for his success. During these years he gathered by painstaking surveys and personal observations data for a map of Texas, published by Tanner in 1829; charted Galveston bay and the several harbors and navigable rivers of the state; promoted trade with the United States and kept a stream of immigrants flowing into the colony; encouraged the erection of gins and sawmills and the establishment of schools; and exercised throughout a most remarkable influence over the legislature at Saltillo in matters affecting the interest of the colony. To mention but a few instances of this, he was responsible in consider-

<sup>21</sup> Austin to political chief, May 8, 1826, general land office, Austin, Texas, 54: 26.

<sup>22</sup> Austin to Bell, April 16, 1830, Austin papers.

able degree for the liberal terms of the colonization law, his arguments prevented the constitutional abolition of slavery in 1827 and secured the labor law of the next year permitting the continued introduction of slaves in the form of indentured servants, and in 1829 his desire to protect the colonists against suit for debts contracted before coming to the country found expression in what we should now consider a somewhat sweeping homestead law. He himself was a member of the legislature in 1831-1832, and was reelected in 1834 but was prevented from serving by his detention in Mexico.<sup>23</sup>

Burdened as he was with the affairs of his own colony, he found time to answer the calls of others. He repeatedly exerted himself to obtain titles for families who had drifted in and settled on the eastern border of the province before the passage of the colonization law; and he was always ready to give other *empresarios* the benefit of his knowledge and experience. DeWitt was deeply indebted to him for such success as he enjoyed, Burnet drew heavily upon him, and Edwards received advice that ought to have saved him from the folly of the Fredonian rebellion. He perceived very clearly the mutual interest of all in the peaceful and rapid development of Texas, and, with the field so vast and the laborers so few, he welcomed every additional effort in the promotion of that end. Some of his fellow-*empresarios*, however, without his vision and interest in the permanent growth of the country, doubted his sincerity and blamed him for embarrassments and failures due to their own impatience, greed, and unwillingness to adapt themselves to Mexican racial characteristics and sensibilities. What was needed in Texas, he said, was “*men*, . . . not open mouthed politicians, nor selfish visionary speculators, nor jealous ambitious declamatory demagogues who will irritate the public mind by inflammatory criticisms about temporary evils and by indulging in vague surmises. We need men of enlightened judgement, disinterested prudence, and reflection, with a great stock of patience, unshaken perseverance and integrity of purpose. Men who will calmly put their shoulders to the wheel and toil for the good of others as well as for their own, and who will be contented to rise with the country without [trying] to force it forward prema-

<sup>23</sup> Each statement in this paragraph is based on abundance of manuscript sources in the Austin papers.

turely to overtop the genl. level of prosperity by undue individual advancement. A band of *such* men firmly linked together by bonds of mutual confidence and unity of purpose and action could and would make Texas the garden of North America.”<sup>24</sup>

He did not, of course, as we have seen, escape misconstruction by his own colonists, but this he philosophically recognized as inevitable and even necessary, in a way, to the success of the colony. “To have been universally popular amongst the settlers for the first two or three years,” he said, “would have endangered all, for it would have excited vague jealousies in the [fear?] alone that I was conciliating popular favor in order to wield it in a particular way. To have been universally unpopular endangered all in another way, for it would have totally destroyed that degree of popular confidence and character abroad which was necessary to draw emigration and it would also have deprived me of the power of controuling the settlers sufficiently to have prevented them from destroying themselves. . . . The reflecting and worthy part of the settlers have always adhered to me firmly throughout. [The other class] abused me over their grog and at times have had weight enough to require humoring and management to keep within bounds, but they effectually removed all suspicion that I was courting the favor of a rabble for the purpose of wielding it, and in this they did me and the colony a service, though without knowing or intending it, and I used their abuse of me to advance the public good and establish myself more firmly in the confidence of my rulers.”<sup>25</sup> He was conservative in declaring that the “reflecting and worthy part of the settlers” adhered to him, and they were always a vast majority. They brought him their personal troubles and perplexities, and surrendered completely to his guidance in every crisis through which the colony passed. This was true in 1826, when he led them against Edwards’ rebellious “frontier republicans” at Nacogdoches; in 1829, when he obtained the exemption of Texas from President Guerrero’s emancipation decree; in 1830, when he reconciled them to the federal decree limiting immigration from the United States, while taking steps to secure its suspension; in 1832, when, after the expulsion of Bustamante’s gar-

<sup>24</sup> Austin to Wharton, April 24, 1829, Austin papers.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

risons from Texas during his absence, he convinced Colonel Mexia of their loyalty to the liberal party of Santa Anna; in 1833, when they petitioned for the separation of Texas and Coahuila and sent him to Mexico to urge its approval; and, finally, in 1835, when they resisted Santa Anna's encroachments on republican government, for without his advice and organizing influence very few would have been ready then to take up arms. The revolution once begun, he was called to the command of the army, much as Washington went to Cambridge, to quiet the claims of rival aspirants, and when order was established and the campaign under way they sent him to the United States to find money and munitions to maintain it.

His control of the settlers in every essential movement as they increased from a few hundred in 1821 to many thousand in 1835 proves him a great leader. The confidence of Mexican officials despite their innate fear of Anglo-American expansion, which was constantly stimulated by the efforts of the United States to acquire Texas, proves him a diplomat of no mean ability. With both, his success was due to his absolute honesty and fearless candor.

His one purpose was the advancement of Texas. "I feel," he said only a few months before his death, "a more lively interest for its welfare than can be expressed—one that is greatly superior to all pecuniary or personal views of any kind. The prosperity of Texas has been the object of my labors, the idol of my existence—it has assumed the character of a *religion* for the guidance of my thoughts and actions for fifteen years."<sup>26</sup> He sincerely believed until the beginning of 1836 that the best interest of Texas lay in its loyalty to Mexico, that the colonists and the government had, therefore, a common interest in its development, and he was the efficient apostle of that faith. He felt some fear of the outcome of republican government in Mexico, he knew that the people were not fitted for it, but hoped that they might stumble along until education and experience prepared them for it.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, as a prudent man would in his position, he sometimes contemplated a condition of anarchy or oppression that would render continued loyalty im-

<sup>26</sup> Austin to General E. P. Gaines, July 27, 1836, Austin papers.

<sup>27</sup> Austin to Carr, March 4, 1829, Austin papers.

possible. In such a contingency, though he shrank from it, he favored independence; never, until shortly before his death, was he in favor of annexation to the United States. As an "independent speck in the galaxy of nations," he wrote in 1829, "Europe will gladly receive our cotton and sugar etc. on advantageous terms in exchange for 'untariffed' manufactured articles. We should be too contemptible to excite the jealousy of the Northern mammoth, and policy and interest would induce Europe to let us alone. I deem it to be more than probable that the great powers would all unite in guaranteeing the Independence of little Texas. There are many powerful reasons why it would be to their interest to do it."<sup>28</sup> On his attitude toward annexation there is an abundance of material from 1830 to 1835, and there can be no doubt of his sincerity.<sup>29</sup> This conclusion does not rest alone on an interpretation of Austin's own statements, for in 1834 Anthony Butler attributed to him his failure to buy Texas.<sup>30</sup> Two reasons for opposing annexation Austin gives: the land system of the United States and slavery. "If that Govt. should get hold of us and introduce its *land* system, thousands who are now on the move and who have not yet secured titles would be totally ruined. The greatest misfortune that could befall Texas at this moment would be a sudden change by which any of the emigrants would be thrown upon the liberality of the Congress of the United States of the North."<sup>31</sup> This he wrote to his brother-in-law in 1830. A few months later he wrote that he "should oppose a union with the United States without some *guarantees*, amongst them I should insist on the perpetual exclusion of slavery from this country."<sup>32</sup> No doubt the tariff figured in his consideration, and it is evident, too, that he believed that a strong population in Texas would ultimately wield such an influence with the government as to be freer under Mexico than under the United States.<sup>33</sup>

Austin's views on slavery, despite the quotation just read, and

<sup>28</sup> Austin to Wharton, April 24, 1829, Austin papers.

<sup>29</sup> On Austin's attitude toward independence see article by Barker in the *Quarterly of the Texas state historical association*, 13: 257-284.

<sup>30</sup> Butler to McLane, July 13, 1834, state department manuscripts, despatches from agents to Mexico, volume 6.

<sup>31</sup> Austin to Perry, March 28, 1830, Austin papers.

<sup>32</sup> Austin to Henry Austin, June 1, 1830, Austin papers.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Austin to Wharton, April 24, 1829, Austin papers.

a number of other expressions equally unequivocal, require explanation. He successfully opposed constitutional emancipation in 1827, urged in vain at the same time that immigrants be permitted to continue bringing slaves from the United States, obtained the withdrawal of Guerrero's emancipation decree in 1829, and declared in 1835 that Texas must be a slave state. The contradiction is more apparent than real, but when all is said some inconsistency remains. The truth seems to be that he did deplore slavery, but that he recognized its economic necessity in the development of Texas. Most of his colonists were naturally to be expected from the neighboring slave states, but slave owners would not come if forbidden to bring their slaves, and others who did come would be greatly hampered by the absence of free labor. About the time of this letter he seems to have felt that a satisfactory compromise might be reached by the labor law of 1828, which, in effect, established the peonage system of Mexico. He wrote in 1831, "Negroes can be brought here under indentures, as servants, but *not as slaves*. This question of slavery is a difficult one to get on with. It will ultimately be admitted, or the free negroes will be formed by law into a separate and distinct class—the *laboring class*. Color forms a line of demarkation between them and the whites. The law must assign their station, fix their rights and their disabilities and obligations—something between slavery and freedom, but neither the one nor the other. Either this or slavery in full must take place. Which is best? Quien sabe? It is a difficult and dark question."<sup>34</sup> In 1832 the labor law was modified, limiting contracts thereafter to ten years,—hence, perhaps, his declaration for slavery in 1835. His defense of existing slavery in 1826-1827, it should be added, was based on what he considered guaranteed vested right, his original contract with the Spanish government, under which his first families were introduced, having recognized slavery by augmenting a settler's headright in proportion to the number of slaves he owned.<sup>35</sup>

I have tried to present in this short paper something of the personality of Austin as he revealed himself in his work. He was a grave, gentle, kindly man, charitable, tolerant, affection-

<sup>34</sup> Austin to Mrs. Holley (copy), July 19, 1831, Austin papers.

<sup>35</sup> There is much material on the subject of this sentence; see for example Austin to *ayuntamiento* of Bexar, August 14, 1826, general land office, 57: 96.



ate and loyal, naturally impulsive but restrained by habit, sensitive, lonely, and given too much, perhaps, to introspection. He enjoyed social companionship, but his position set him apart from the colonists and made close friendships with them difficult and rare. He smoked, danced now and then, loved music (he played the flute in his younger days), and his bills show occasional charges for whiskey, brandy, and wine. He was well educated, widely read for his opportunities, and a clear thinker. His letters in their straightforward precision and naturalness remind one of Franklin. He worked incessantly, unselfishly, and generally most patiently. In short, he appears to me a lovable human character, with many charming qualities.

On returning from his mission to the United States in the summer of 1836 he was persuaded to be a candidate for the presidency. He consented with indifference<sup>36</sup> and took his defeat by Houston with equanimity. He had been absent from the country for the better part of three years on public business, part of the time in a Mexican prison; his personal affairs were greatly neglected, and he welcomed the prospect of leisure to put them in order. However, when his victorious rival asked him to be secretary of state, he consented, in the belief that he could be useful in bringing the infant republic to the favorable notice of the older governments. As usual he immersed himself in public duties to the utter neglect of self; and died from overwork and exposure on December 27, 1836. For fifteen years he had held the destiny of Texas in the hollow of his hand, and, characteristically, his last conscious thought was of its welfare. He waked from a dream thinking that the United States had recognized its independence, and died in that belief.<sup>37</sup> His death thus, at the age of only forty-three, on the eve of the fruition of all his labors, with the country redeemed from the wilderness and others assuming the burden of responsibility that had deprived him of home, wife, and family, is one of fate's grim ironies—a distressing personal tragedy.

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<sup>36</sup> Austin to Gail Borden, Jr. [August, 1836], Austin papers, miscellaneous.

<sup>37</sup> George L. Hammeken, "Recollections of Stephen F. Austin," in *Southwestern historical quarterly*, 20: 380.